

[3410-11]

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Upper Illinois River Landscape Management Projects, Siskiyou National Forest,
Josephine County, Oregon

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service (USFS), as a cooperating agency, the USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM), will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The purpose of the EIS is to analyze and disclose the environmental impacts of a site-specific proposal to commercially harvest and regenerate timber, construct, reconstruct and decommission roads, implement timber stand improvement activities, conduct prescribed burns and implement ecosystem restoration projects. The activities are proposed in the East Fork and West Fork Illinois River Watersheds located on lands administered by the Siskiyou National Forest, Illinois Valley Ranger District, and the Bureau of Land Management, Medford District, Grants Pass Resource Area, Josephine County, Oregon.

The USFS/BLM Proposed Action will be in compliance with the Siskiyou National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1989), the Bureau of Land Management, Medford District, Resource Management Plan (1995), and the Northwest Forest Plan (1994) which provide overall guidance for forest management in the

respective Agency's planning areas. This proposal is scheduled for implementation during Fiscal Years 2000-2003.

The Siskiyou National Forest, together with the Bureau of Land Management, Medford District, invite written comments concerning the scope of the analysis in addition to those comments already received as a result of local public participation activities. The Forest Service will also give notice of the full environmental analysis and decision-making process so that interested and affected people are made aware as to how they may participate and contribute to the final decision.

DATE: Issues and comments concerning the scope, implementation and analysis of the proposed action must be received in writing before June 25, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Submit written issues with the Proposed Action to Joel King, District Ranger, Illinois Valley Ranger District, 26568 Redwood Highway, Cave Junction, Oregon, 97523, and/or Robert C. Korfhage, Grants Pass Resource Area Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, Medford District, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon 97504.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Direct questions about the Proposed Action and EIS to either the Forest Service or BLM contacts. The Forest Service contact is Peter Gaulke, Environmental Coordinator, Siskiyou National Forest, PO Box 440, Grants Pass, Oregon 97528, phone (541) 471-6758. The BLM contact is Doug Parker, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Bureau of Land Management, Medford District, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon 97504, phone (541) 770-2388.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Upper Illinois River Landscape

Management Projects planning area contains approximately 37,000 acres in the East Fork Illinois River Watershed, and 51,000 acres in the West Fork Illinois River Watershed.

The legal description of the **East Fork Illinois River Watershed Planning Area** is: T.17N., R.05E., Sections 1-4, 9-11; T.17N., R.06E., Section 6; T.18N., R.05E., Sections 1-5, 8-17, 20-36; T.18N., R.06E., Sections 5-8, 17-20, 30-31; T.19N., R.05E., Sections 31-36; T.19N., R.06E., Sections 31-32, Humbolt Meridian; T.39S., R.07W., Sections 7-9, 16-21, 29-31; T.39S., R.08W., Sections 11-16, 20-28, 33-36; T.40S., R.07W., Sections 19-21, 28-32; T.40S., R.08W., Sections 2-4, 10-11, 14-15, 21-28, 33-36; T.41S., R.07W., Sections 5-8, 16-18; T.41S., R.08W., Sections 1-5, 9-17, Willamette Meridian.

The legal description of the **West Fork Illinois River Watershed Planning Area** is: T.18N., R.03E., Sections 1, 12; T.18N., R.04E., Sections 1-5, 8-15, 24; T.18N., R.05E., Sections 5-8, 17-20; T.19N., R.04E., Sections 32-36; T.19N., R.05E., Sections 31-32, Humbolt Meridian; T.39S., R.08W., Sections 30-31; T.39S., R.09W., Sections 18-20, 24-36; T.39S., R.10W., Sections 24-26, 34-36; T.40S., R.08W., Sections 6, 9, 20, 31-32; T.40S., R.09W., Sections 1-24, 26-34; T.40S., R.10W., Sections 1-2, 12-13, 24-26, 35-36; T.41S., R.08W., Sections 4-9, 16-18; T.41S., R.09W., Sections 2-10, 12-18; T.41S., R.10W., Sections 1-2, 11-13, Willamette Meridian. Within these legal descriptions, only Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management managed lands will be considered for management activities.

The Forest Service is proposing to implement activities identified on its 5-Year Action Plan within the **East Fork Illinois River Watershed**. Activities include, in part,

the Kingfish Timber Sale, Elder Trail Timber Sale, and Cougar Ridge Timber Sale, involving approximately 2485 acres of harvest units. Silvicultural prescriptions include commercial thinning, small group selection and regeneration harvests. The Upper Illinois River Landscape Management Projects includes precommercial thinning for forest health and stand development, road decommissioning, prescribed burning for wildlife habitat improvement and fuels reduction, and stream restoration activities. These proposed activities will involve Matrix (MA-14), Partial Retention (MA-13), Riparian Reserve (MA-11) and Late-Successional Reserve (MA-8) land allocations.

Projects activities associated with the Esterly Lakes Landscape Project are planned in both the East Fork and West Fork Illinois River Watersheds on BLM administered lands. These projects are being planned as a part of the implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan and the Medford District's Resource Management Plan. The Easterly Lakes Landscape Project includes a mix of forest stand thinning to promote forest health and desired forest habitat conditions, timber harvesting, prescribed burning to reduce fire hazard and manipulate stand composition, and young stand management such as thinning and/or brushing on BLM administered lands. It will also include the restoration of declining special vegetation types and habitats, stream and riparian reserve restoration, and various types of roadwork.

The Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action is to implement management direction in the Upper Illinois River planning area and specifically focus on:

- (1) A healthy and resilient ecosystem and watershed in the planning area.
- (2) Meet Visual Resource Management Objectives.

(3) Riparian reserves for Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives, water quality, and fisheries within the project areas in the long-term.

(4) Silvicultural treatments that maintain or improve forest health.

(5) Harvest timber to meet the demand for wood products.

(6) Unique wildlife or botanical habitats identified in the respective planning documents.

In preparing the EIS, the Forest Service will tier to the Northwest Forest Plan, the BLM Medford District's Resource Management Plan, and the Siskiyou National Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan as amended. The Forest Service will also consider issues submitted to the Proposed Action, and develop additional alternatives to the proposed action that respond to the significant issues with the Proposed Action. The no action alternative will be considered.

Public participation will be important at several times during the analysis. The first time is during the scoping period [Reviewer may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environment Policy Act (CFR) at 40 CFR 1501.7]. The Agency will be seeking written issues with the Proposed Action from Federal, State, and local agencies, any affected Indian tribes, and other individuals who may be interested in or affected by the Proposed Action. This input will be used to develop additional alternatives. The scoping process includes:

- * Identifying potential issues;

- * Selecting significant issues with the Proposed Action, needing in-depth analysis;

* Eliminating insignificant issues; issues that have been analyzed and documented in a previous EIS, issues that controvert the need for the Proposed Action, or issues that are outside the authority of the Responsible Official to decide;

* Exploration of additional alternatives based on the issues identified during the scoping process; and

* Identification of potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives (i.e. direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and connected actions).

The Draft EIS is expected to be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and be available for review by July 1999. The comment period for the Draft EIS will be 45 days from the date that the EPA published the Notice of Availability appears in the Federal Register.

The Forest Service believes it is important to give Reviewers notice at this early stage of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, a reviewer of a Draft EIS must structure their participation in the environmental review process of the proposal so that it is specific, meaningful, and alerts an agency to the reviewer's position and contentions. Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft EIS stage, but that are not raised until after completion of the final EIS, may be waived or dismissed by the courts. City of Angoon v. Hodel, 803 F.2d. 1016, 1022 (9th Cir. 1986) and Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the 60-day comment period

so that substantive comments and objectives are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider and respond to them in the final EIS.

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the proposed action, comments on the draft EIS should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific pages or chapters of the draft EIS. Comments may also address the inadequacy of the draft EIS or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the EIS. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

After the 60-day comment period ends on the draft EIS, comments will be considered and analyzed by the Agency in preparing the final EIS. The final EIS is scheduled for completion by October 1999. In the final EIS, the Forest Service is required to respond to the comments and responses received during the comment period that pertain to the environmental consequences discussed in the draft EIS and applicable laws, regulations, and policies considered in making the decision regarding the proposal. A final EIS is expected in November 1999.

The Forest Service Responsible Official will be Mike Lunn, Siskiyou National Forest Supervisor. The Bureau of Land Management Responsible Office will be Robert C. Korfhage, Grants Pass Resource Area Field Manager. They will consider the final EIS, applicable laws, regulations, policies, and analysis files in making their decisions. The Responsible Officials will document the decision and rationale in their Record of Decision. The Forest Service decision will be subject to appeal by the general public

under 36 CFR 215. The Bureau of Land Management decision will be subject to protest by the general public in accordance with 43 CFR 5003.

J. Michael Lunn
J. Michael Lunn
Forest Supervisor

6/9/1999
Date